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INTELLECTUAL IMPROVEMENT.

AGREEING in opinion with a celebrated writer in the Spectator, that "what sculpture is to a block of marble, Education is to the mind of man—that the philosopher, the poet, the hero, the wise, the great, or the good man, very often lie hid in a plebeian, which a proper education might bring to light;" and convinced, as we are, that we could not render a greater service to many of our readers, than by occasionally turning a serious attention to the subject, we shall make no excuse for laying before them the following extract from a very popular American work,* re-published in England and Scotland, and which has already, within a very few weeks, gone through several editions of various sizes and forms.

The great mass of mankind consider the intellectual powers as susceptible of a certain degree of development in childhood to prepare the individual for the active duties of life. This degree of progress they suppose to be made before the age of twenty is attained, and hence they talk of an education being finished! Now if a parent wishes to convey the idea that his daughter has closed her studies at school, or that his son has finished his preparatory professional studies, and is ready to commence practice, there is perhaps no strong objection to his using the common phrase that the education is finished; but in any general or proper use of language there is no such thing as a finished education. The most successful scholar that ever left a school, or took his honorary degree at college, never arrived at a good place to stop in his intellectual course. In fact, the farther he goes the more desirous he will feel to go on; and if you wish to find an instance of the greatest eagerness and interest with which the pursuit of knowledge is prosecuted, you will find it undoubtedly in the case of the most accomplished and thorough scholar which the country can furnish, who has spent a long life in study, and who finds that the further he goes, the more and more widely does the boundless field of intelligence open before him.

Give up then at once all idea of finishing your education. The sole object of the course of discipline at any literary institution in our land is not to *finish*, but just to show you how to *begin*;—to give you an impulse and a direction upon that course, which you ought to pursue with unabated and uninterrupted ardour as long as you live.

It is unquestionably true that every person, whatever are his circumstances or condition in life, ought at all times to be making some steady efforts to enlarge his stock of knowledge, to increase his mental powers, and thus to expand the field of his intellectual vision. I suppose most of my readers are convinced of this, and are desirous, if the way can only be distinctly pointed out, of making such efforts. In fact, no inquiry is more frequently made by intelligent young persons than this,—“What course of reading shall I pursue? What book shall I select, and what plan in reading them shall I adopt?” These inquiries I now propose to answer.

The object of study are of several kinds; some of the most important I shall enumerate.

1. *To increase our intellectual powers.* Every one knows that there is a difference of ability in different minds, but it is not so distinctly understood that every one's abilities may be increased or strengthened by a kind of culture adapted expressly to this purpose;—I mean a culture which is intended not to add to the stock of knowledge, but only to increase intellectual power. Suppose, for example, that when Robinson Crusoe on his desolate island had first found Friday the savage, he had said to himself as follows:

“This man looks wild and barbarous enough. He is to stay with me and help me in my various plans, but he could help me much more effectually if he was more of an intellectual being, and less of a mere animal. Now I can increase his intellectual power by culture, and I will. But what shall I teach him?”

On reflecting a little further upon the subject, he would say to himself as follows:

“I must not always teach him things necessary for him to know in order to assist me in my work, but I must try to teach him to think for himself. Then he will be far more valuable as a servant than if he has to depend upon me for every thing he does.”

Accordingly, some evening when the two, master and man, have finished the labours of the day, Robinson is walking upon the sandy beach with his wild savage by his side, and he commences to give him his first lesson in mathematics. He picks up a slender and pointed shell, and with it draws carefully a circle upon the sand.

“What is that?” says Friday.

“It is what we call a circle,” says Robinson; “I want you now to come and stand here, and attentively consider what I am going to tell you about it.”

Now Friday has, we will suppose, never given his serious mental effort upon any subject, for five minutes at a time, in his life. The simple mathematical principle is a complete labyrinth of perplexity to him. He comes up and looks at the smooth and beautiful curve, which his master has drawn in the sand, with a gaze of stupid amazement.

“Now, listen carefully to what I say,” says Robinson, “and see if you can understand it. Do you see this little point I make in the middle of the circle?”

Friday says he does, and wonders what is to come from the magic character which he sees before him.

“This,” continues Robinson, “is a circle, and that point is the centre. Now if I draw lines from the centre in any direction to the outside, these lines will all be equal.”

So saying he draws several lines. He sets Friday to measuring them. Friday sees that they are equal, and is pleased, from two distinct causes; one that he has successfully exercised his thinking powers, and the other that he has learned something which he never knew before.

I wish now that the reader would understand that Robinson does not take this course with Friday because he wishes him to understand the nature of the circle. Suppose we were to say to him, “Why did you take such a course as that with your savage? You can teach him much more useful things than the properties of the circle. What good will it do to him to know how to make circles? Do you expect him to draw geometrical diagrams for you, or to calculate and project eclipses?”

“No,” Robinson would reply, “I do not care about Friday's understanding the properties of the circle. But I do want him to be a *thinking being*, and if I can induce him to think half an hour steadily and carefully, it is of no consequence upon what subject his thoughts are employed. I chose the circle because that seemed easy and distinct,—suitable for the first lesson. I do not know that he will ever have occasion for the fact that the radii of a circle are equal, as long as he shall live,—but he will have occasion for the *power of patient attention and thought*, which he acquired while attempting to understand that subject.”

This would unquestionably be sound philosophy, and a savage who should study such a lesson on the beach of his own wild island, would for ever after be less of a savage than before. The effect upon his mental powers of one single effort like that would last, and a series of such efforts would transform him from a fierce and ungovernable but stupid animal, to a cultivated and intellectual man.

Thus it is with all education. One great object is to *increase the powers*, and this is entirely distinct from the *acquisition of knowledge*. Scholars very often ask, when pursuing some difficult study, “What good will it do me to know this?” But that is not the question. They ought to ask “What good will it do me to *learn it*?” What effect upon my habits of thinking and upon my intellectual powers will be produced by the efforts to examine and to conquer these difficulties?”

A very fine example of this is the study of conic sections, a difficult branch of the course of mathematics pursued in college; a study which from its difficulty, and its apparent uselessness, is often very unpopular in the class pursuing it. The question is very often asked, “What good will it ever do us in after-life to understand

* “Abbott's Young Christian,”

all these mysteries of the Parabola and the Hyperbola, and the Ordinates and Abscissas, and Asymtotes?" The answer is, that the *knowledge of the facts* which you acquire will probably do you no good whatever. That is not the object, and every college officer knows full well that the mathematical principles which this science demonstrates are not brought into use in after-life by one scholar in ten. But every college officer, and every intelligent student who will watch the operations of his own mind and the influence which such exercises exert upon it, knows equally well that the study of the higher mathematics produces an effect in *enlarging and disciplining the intellectual powers*, which the whole of life will not obliterate.

Do not shrink, then, from difficult work in your efforts at intellectual improvement. You ought, if you wish to secure the greatest advantage, to have some difficult work, that you may acquire habits of patient research, and increase and strengthen your intellectual powers.

CAROLIN, THE IRISH BARD.

The celebrated Irish bard, Carolin, who lived towards the close of the seventeenth century, and was blind from his infancy, had, from an error in his education, at an early period of his life, contracted a fondness for spirituous liquors, which he retained even to the last stage of it. But inordinate gratifications bear their own punishment; nor was Carolin exempt from this general imposition. His physicians assured him, that unless he corrected this vicious habit, he would soon put an end to his mortal career. He obeyed with reluctance, and seriously resolved upon never tasting that forbidden, though to him delicious, cup. The town of Boyle, in the county of Roscommon, was at that time his principal place of residence. There, while under so severe a regimen, he walked, or rather wandered about in a reverie; his usual gaiety forsook him; no sallies of a lively imagination escaped him; every moment was marked by a dejection of spirit, approaching to the deepest melancholy; and his harp, his favourite harp, lay in some obscure corner of his habitation, neglected and unstrung. Passing one day by a grocer's shop in the town, our Irish Orpheus, after a six week's quarantine, was tempted to step in; undetermined whether he should abide by his late resolution, or whether he should yield to the impulse which he felt at the moment. "Well, my dear friend," cried he to the young man who stood behind the counter, "you see I am a man of constancy; for six long weeks have I refrained from whiskey: was there ever so great an instance of self-denial? But a thought strikes me, and surely you will not be cruel enough to refuse one gratification which I shall earnestly solicit. Bring hither a measure of my favourite liquor, which I shall smell to, but indeed shall not taste." The lad indulged him on that condition; and no sooner did the fumes ascend to his brain, than every latent spark within him was rekindled. His countenance glowed with an unusual brightness; and the soliloquy which he repeated over the cup, was the effusion of a heart newly animated, and the ramblings of a genius which a Sterne would have pursued with raptures of delight. At length, to the great peril of his health, and contrary to the advice of medical friends, he once more quaffed the forbidden draught, and renewed the brimner, until his spirits were sufficiently exhilarated, and until his mind had resumed its former tone. He immediately set about composing his much admired song, which goes by the name of Carolan's (and sometimes Stafford's) Receipt.—He commenced the words, and began to modulate the air in the evening at Boyle, and before the following morning he sung and played this noble offspring of his imagination in Mr. Stafford's parlour at Elphin.

Carolin's inordinate fondness for Irish wine, as Peter the Great used to call whiskey, will certainly not admit of excuse; it was a vice of habit, and therefore might have been corrected; but he seldom drank to excess; and he seemed to think, nay, was convinced from experience, that the spirit of whiskey was grateful to his muse, and for that reason he generally offered it when he wished to invoke her. "They tell me," says Dr. Campbell, "that in his latter days he never composed without the

inspiration of whiskey, of which, at that critical time, he always took care to have a bottle beside him."

It is somewhat remarkable, that Carolin, in his gayest mood, and even when his genius was most elevated by "the flowing bowl," never could compose a planxty for a Miss Brett in the County of Sligo, whose father's house he frequented, and where he always met with a reception due to his exquisite taste and mental endowments. One day, after an unsuccessful attempt to compose something in a sprightly strain for this lady, he threw aside his harp with a mixture of rage and grief; and addressing himself in Irish, of which he was a pleasing and elegant speaker, to her mother, "Madam," said he, "I have often, from my great respect to your family, attempted a planxty, in order to celebrate your daughter's perfections, but to no purpose. Some evil genius hovers over me; there is not a string in my harp that does not vibrate a melancholy sound when I set about this task. I fear she is not doomed to remain long among us; nay," said he, emphatically, "she will not survive twelve months." The event verified the prediction, and the young lady died within the period limited by the unconscious prophetic bard.

WE readily give a place to the following, from the pen of our ingenious and philosophical correspondent, Mr. GERTY of Ballymena, Co. Antrim.

SONG.

Tune—"Miss Forbes's Farewell to Banff."

I've wand'red here, I've wand'red there
And many a bonnie lass have seen;
But where's the maiden half so fair—
As Ballymena's bonnie Jean?

To say she's like the blushing rose,
Or like the dew her glancing e'en,
A faint idea would disclose,
Of all the charms of bonnie Jean.

And ne'er beneath a breast of snow,
E'er dwelt a heart more kind, I ween,
Than that, which feels the friendly glow
Within the breast of bonnie Jean.

How fair the tints we love to trace,
When dewy ev'ning smiles serene;
But fairer is the lovely face
Of Ballymena's bonnie Jean.

And when the lover tells his tale
Beneath yon spreading hawthorn green,
May artless truth and love prevail;
And win the heart of bonnie Jean.

And when in wedlock's sacred band,
May discord never come between;
But truth and love go hand and hand,
And bless the days of bonnie Jean.

DRUNKENNESS.

Many fashionable young men of the present age seem to take a degree of pleasure in inebriety. They will insinuate, even to ladies, their fets of the bottle, by innuendos, "I've been keeping it up last night," &c. but this is founded upon bad principles, and worse taste. If they would reflect that drunkenness particularly degrades a man from the station he holds relative to the fair sex—it would soon be out of fashion. The Athenians made severe laws against drunkards, and in magistracies it was punished with death, by a law of Solon. The Lacedemonians also proscribed it, and used to expose drunken slaves before the youths to excite disgust.—The Nervii used no wine, lest they should become effeminate. Women were punished severely among the Romans, for that vice. Neither Carthaginians nor Sarcens used wine; and Mahomet had wise reasons in forbidding it. The Spanish word for drunkard is *barachio* (a pig skin) evidently figurative, and a term of degradation, because they carry their wine in a skin tied at both ends; and even the Cherokee Indians have enacted the severest penalties against the use of spirituous liquors.

DUBLIN:

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